

The Caravan from Central America - Let Them In!

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They have been on the road since October 12, a "caravan" of more than 7,000 refugees from Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador, heading for Tijuana on the US-Mexican border. Now they have reached southern Mexico. They have chosen this course of action because they no longer see any hope of a minimally decent and secure life in their own countries. Entire families, including grandparents and young children, see this not as a political demonstration but an expression of sheer material necessity. They march together so they can protect themselves from those who want to exploit and harm them, the people smugglers and the criminal gangs, who kidnap and use fugitives for drug trafficking or prostitution.

For many years the number of "refugees" from Costa Rica, Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala has been increasing. They are fleeing from grinding poverty as well as from wars and rampant criminality. Their destination is the USA. But in the first half of 2018 alone, the USA and Mexico have sent more than 37,000 such refugees back to Honduras, a cycle of flight, repression and deportation.

Meanwhile, their goal, "the land of the free", has already declared a "state of emergency" because of "invaders", and sent 5,000 additional soldiers to protect the Texan-Mexican border in addition to the border police and the National Guard. Donald Trump has denounced the projected arrival at the US-Mexican border of these unarmed and impoverished people as an "invasion". Speaking to an election rally where he was greeted by repeated chants of USA-USA and "Build that Wall" by his besotted racist followers, he claimed; "Many gang members and some very bad people are mixed into the caravan heading to our Southern Border".

Inspired by his hate rhetoric, members of the assault rifle toting, far right militias from the Trump heartlands have declared their intention to head for the border to repel the "invaders". It is noteworthy too that Robert Gregory Bowers, who massacred 11 mainly elderly Jewish worshippers in the Tree of Life synagogue in Philadelphia claiming "the Jews" were behind the "immigrant invasion" of the USA, appears to have chosen this target because of its record of campaigning on behalf of refugees. Antisemitic incidents have increased since Trump's election and his failure to unequivocally condemn a white supremacist torchlight march in Charlottesville on August 11, 2017, one of whose slogans was "Jews will not replace us"!

Meanwhile, the President has outlined plans to build what he calls "massive cities of tents", adding with studied sarcasm, "nice tents", in desert terrain, for any people who manage to cross the border. He promises to dispatch a further 15,000 federal troops, telling them to open fire on the "invaders", such is the demagoguery the right wing president has brought to electioneering in "the land of the free".

Cynically, Trump claims these few thousand poor fugitives are a deliberately "planned" intervention in the US mid-term elections, due on November 6, by the Venezuelan government and the right wing's favourite hate figure, billionaire George Soros. Soros is accused of financing the trek with the aim of smuggling gangs of "leftists", drug dealers and other assorted criminals into the USA to stop Trump from making

America Great Again by helping the Democrats capture the House of Representatives.

Why they are marching

The Catholic Church in Honduras which, like many of the Central American churches, has to take care of the poor, explained the causes for the flight of the marchers as simply the result of an economic crisis and "bad governance" in the country. This has gone on for many years and resulted in "poverty, inequality and lack of opportunities" and is now leading to a "human tragedy". Perhaps the Catholic Church is also part of Trump's left-wing conspiracy?

The Honduran President, Juan Orlando Hernández, an admirer of Trump, confirms his slanders about the criminal backgrounds of the fugitives. Meanwhile, as a "reward", Honduras, like the neighbouring states, has received cuts in US financial aid for not having stopped the refugees setting out, and the US administration is now increasing this pressure on Mexico to stop them. In Mexican towns and villages en route they have been welcomed, fed and sheltered. At first, the current president, Enrique Peña Nieto, sent marines to Mexico's southern border in a vain attempt to block their entry. Now he has offered the fugitives asylum in Mexico with "women and children" treated preferentially. But, except for a few hundred, the marchers have refused, saying they want to continue their march for their right to a better life. In interviews, the Hondurans in particular highlighted the appalling living conditions that led them to flee.

Honduras has long been considered one of the "banana republics" in the backyard of US imperialism, whose monopolies continue to be the largest large landowners in the country. Agriculture generates some 15 percent of GDP, mainly through exports of coffee, bananas and tropical timber. The national economy is dependent on the remittances of the "exiled Hondurans", almost \$4 billion a year, in a total GDP of \$23 billion (2017). All economic sectors are ultimately dominated by US imperialism, including a textile industry near the coast and service centres of US corporations for Central America.

At the same time, there has never been a "land reform" in Honduras; the lack of arable land for small farmers drives them into the cities, where they mostly end up in the slums. Here, according to estimates, 70-80 per cent of the population is considered acutely poor. According to Wikipedia: "More than half of the inhabitants live below the poverty line, one fifth are illiterate. Malnutrition is widespread. Medical care in rural areas is miserable (<https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Honduras> [1]).

In interviews with the fugitives, many have said, "we want jobs, we want land and bread", a future their children cannot look forward to in Honduras, but they know that there are better jobs and wages in the US. There they will join the large number of "Hispanics" within the country's construction, service and hospitality industries.

Mexico's president elect, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, known as AMLO, will assume office on December 1. He has a record of supporting would-be migrants to the USA and appeals to Mexico's traditions of granting asylum under Lázaro Cárdenas in the 1930s. Cárdenas admitted Spanish Republicans fleeing Franco, Jews fleeing Hitler and Leon Trotsky fleeing Stalin's assassins.

His left wing populist party, the National Rejuvenation Movement, known as Morena, is helping the caravan. At the same time, AMLO has indicated that he will seek a rapprochement with the USA after recent conflicts over NAFTA and Trump's egregious demand that Mexico pay for building his Wall. Since Trump is arrogantly threatening economic reprisals unless Mexico stops the refugees from approaching the border crossings, this could be the first big test of AMLO's radicalism.

The fight against racism and for open borders

This situation clearly shows how important is the struggle for open borders, for freedom of movement for

fugitives from war or from hunger, for people seeking safety, work and a minimally decent life. If the international workers' movement stays on the sidelines, if it defends, however passively, "its" nation-state borders, when capital can send jobs and workplaces flying around the globe at the click of a mouse, then it will sacrifice the solidarity we need to combat our class enemies. If even the bourgeois media can make the connection between the domination of the markets and the refugee movement, namely that every "cause of flight" is a product of exploitation by Western banks, oil and mining companies, agribusinesses etc., then workers' organisations, too, must draw the consequences and actively engage in struggle against the racist border regimes.

We must not allow Trump's racist scum to hound the fugitives or to imitate Netanyahu's snipers on the borders of the Gaza Strip. While the economy of the imperialist states is bleeding the semi-colonies of the world dry, those who struggle for a better life within their own country risk falling victim to the right wing tide sweeping the world. For those who flee, the political perspective of their protest must be their right to freedom of movement, for which they deserve and need the support of the Mexican and US workers' movements.

At a time when a US president wants to erect a wall and create concentration camps on the border, this refugee caravan stands for the struggle against the arbitrary imperialist cancellation of the right of asylum. If the US corporations ruin the living conditions of millions in the backyard of Latin America, then it is their right to leave these states, and the duty of the rich rulers of the USA and Europe, who have plundered their lands for centuries, to let them in.

In this struggle they deserve our international solidarity. It will be fantastic if the Mexican trade union movement, the students, the resisters from Oaxaca and Chiapas not only help the caravan to reach the border, but join this march with tens and hundreds of thousands as it approaches its goal. We should not allow the fugitives to be interned, left to the cruelty of desert concentration camps or to snipers. They should experience solidarity, that is the key task.

To this end, mobilisation on the US side of the border, by the powerful anti-Trump movement of workers, young people, women, black and Latino communities, would be an enormous help against the paramilitary militias on the one hand, but also for the right of fugitives to enter, as the famous verses engraved on the base of the Statue of Liberty say:

"Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me.

These lines are not only a condemnation of the foul outpourings of the billionaire Trump and the white supremacists behind him, but a promise that needs to be made a reality by the US Labor, youth and women's movements and every progressive person within this nation of immigrants. And the same applies equally and fully within Europe.

<http://www.fifthinternational.org/content/la-caravana-de-centroamérica-¡déjenlos-entrar>

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Links:

[1] <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Honduras>